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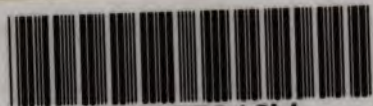
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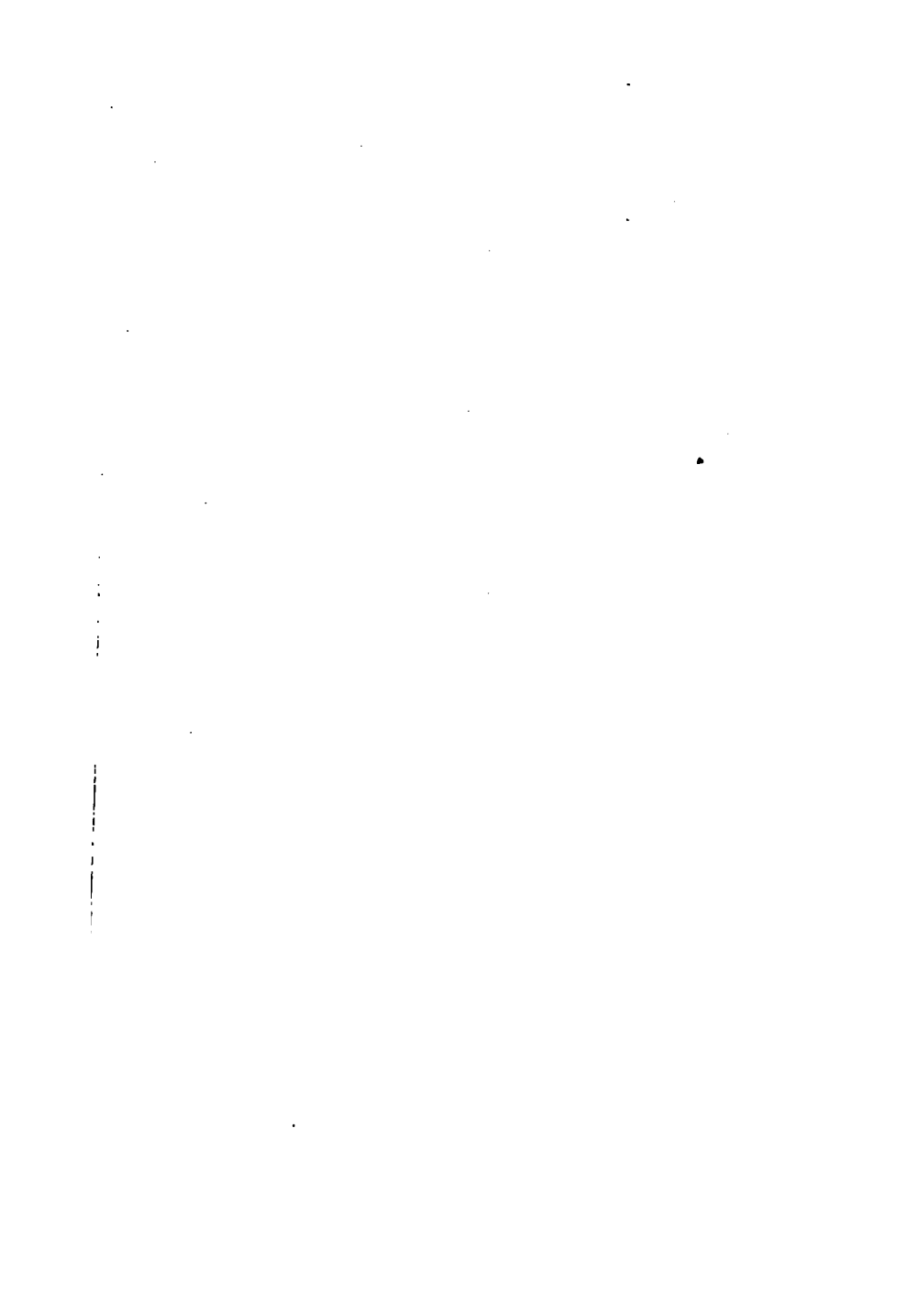
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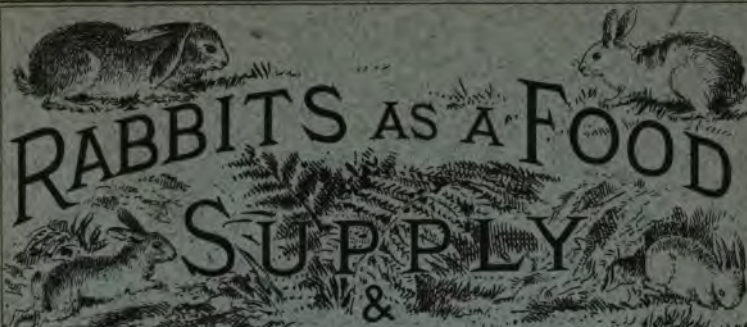
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# RABBITS AS A FOOD SUPPLY

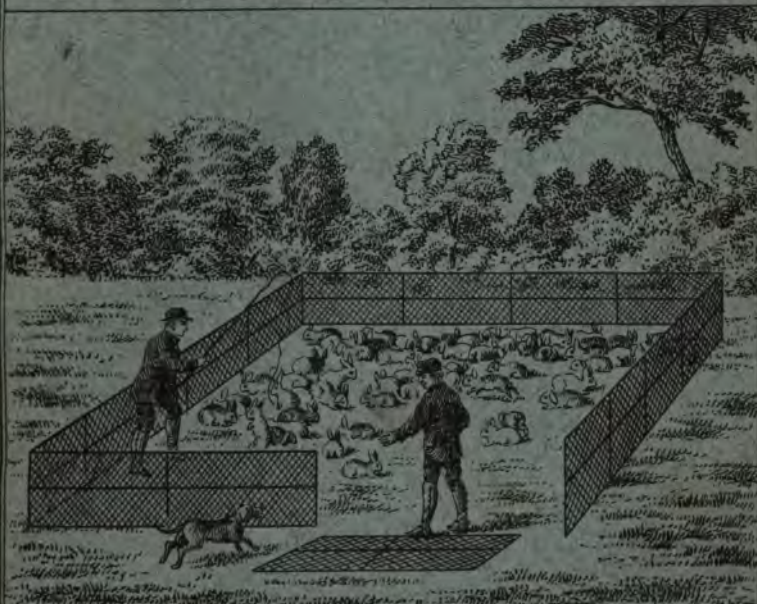
HOW TO FOLD THEM ON OUR  
POOR PASTURES,

BY

MAJOR G. F. MORANT,

AUTHOR OF

"GAME PRESERVERS & BIRD PRESERVERS" &c.



(NOT)  
THE WAY

LONDON.

WILLIAM RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY, W.  
1883.



# RABBITS AS A FOOD SUPPLY.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RABBITS AS AN ADDITION TO OUR FOOD SUPPLY.

IT may not have occurred to many people that the despised rabbit, for whose speedy extermination our Legislature have recently passed The Hare and Rabbit Bill, actually stands fourth on the list of all created animals as a flesh supplier to that carnivorous animal man ; nor that of the almost endless varieties which he found on the globe when he first appeared on the scene himself, he has only succeeded in taming four, so that they live close to his house, ready for him to eat when he is hungry, without the trouble his ancestors had, and many savages still have, of going out to catch them. We purposely omit the goat, whose flesh



is not generally liked by the Anglo-Saxon, though it is usefully kept for the sake of its milk.

But if one of the patriarchs came to dine with us to-morrow, we could only offer him his familiar beef and mutton or pork, at which he would probably be offended, or a bird of some sort, or a rabbit.

From the earliest historic times cattle, horses, sheep, and camels were domesticated by man, nor have the three last-named ever been discovered in a wild state, though there is a report that camels exist wild in a remote part of Eastern Tartary. The herds of so-called wild horses that exist in America and Australia are all the produce of horses which were brought to these countries from the old world ; and so rapidly do they deteriorate, that we have been told a herd of wild Australian horses would not average 3*l.* a head if driven into Aldridges' auction yard for sale. This arises from the mares breeding so young, and from what is called in-and-in breeding.

We can hardly expect to add to our small list of domesticated animals fit for food, as even the discovery of America gave us nothing but 'the turkey ;' and the larger mammalia were only represented by the kangaroo and the dingo, or wild dog, in the whole continent of Australia. It is

a curious fact that the animals found in Australia and New Zealand all differed from those found in the old world ; and we believe that the only bird common to Europe and Australia is *Scolopax Major*, the common snipe ; but we write subject to correction. At the same time in no part of the world have the horse, the sheep, the rabbit, and the house sparrow increased to such an extent when once introduced, which shows that animals have not always been placed by nature in the situations most favourable to them.

Cattle also, when introduced into America and Australia, have multiplied to such an extent that a short time ago it seemed that these countries would supply us with all the meat we should require.

However, a prosperous population, capable of consuming most of the beef produced in the interior, is rapidly springing up on the East Coast of America and intercepting the supplies which used to reach us ; and as the agricultural returns tell us that our flocks and herds have actually decreased while our population has increased in the last four years, the price of beef and mutton is rising until they will soon be out of reach of any but the wealthy. The difficulty of sending meat, either alive or dead, a long voyage has caused a very considerable

quantity of meat to be imported in tins, but this food is not much fancied by the large class of operatives, and they would rather any day buy a rabbit and know what they get for their money than buy a tin of meat called beef or mutton and not be quite sure of its contents. The frequent seizure of meat unfit for human food in our own markets makes people wonder if it is not possible that some of the animals whose flesh fills these tins may not have departed this life without much assistance from the butcher; and the pathetic lament of the gentleman who lived next door to a sausage manufactory and lost his favourite little dog—

Oh where and oh where is my dear little dog,  
Oh where and oh where can he be !  
They make them of horse and they make them of cat,  
And I fear they have made them of *He*—

suggests unpleasant reflections.

Certainly a rabbit has only to be exposed for sale in any of the manufacturing towns to be bought directly, and wild rabbits have risen from 1s. a couple, the price some years ago, to 3s. and 3s. 6d. in some places. The rabbit is known to be a dainty feeder, and there are so many ways of dressing his flesh that he is a favourite in small households, and children in particular generally

prefer him to beef and mutton. The importation of rabbits has become enormous, and they are sold as fast as they are imported, though the ready-skinned creatures do not look very tempting.

Few are aware of the great weight that rabbit fanciers have succeeded in getting rabbits to attain. Some years ago a well-known sportsman laid another a heavy wager that he would in six months produce a rabbit heavier than any hare he could produce; and although the backer of the hare produced a monster from the East Lothians weighing, we believe, 13 lbs., the backer of the rabbit won easy with a Patagonian rabbit.

We saw a statement made by a judge at rabbit shows that he had several times weighed rabbits that scaled 18 lbs. Now 36 lbs. is not a very bad lamb, and as we have proved that we can keep rabbits on our farm, and are keeping them as much under control as our sheep, living where we please, and eating with contented minds what it suits us to give them, these great rabbits will be valuable to increase the size of the wild breed. The flesh of the wild rabbit is always preferred to tame, but the flesh of the half-bred wild rabbits is as good if they are reared in the open air. When it is generally known that rabbits are so kept, any prejudice that exists against them will cease. That there has been

this prejudice there is no doubt, and no one would care to eat the flesh of a sheep that had lived shut up in a wooden box all its life if he could get the flesh of a South Down, an Exmoor, or a Welsh sheep which had lived all its life at liberty, browsing on the various herbs which nature offers it wherever it strays.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE RABBIT IN A STATE OF NATURE.

THE Rabbit is not so generally distributed over the world as one would expect, considering its hardy habits. Through the whole of India, from Bombay to Calcutta, we never saw one, nor during some years' residence in South Africa, though in both countries a hare, not the brown hare (*Lepus timidus*), but a grey hare, more resembling the mountain hare (*Lepus variabilis*) in his summer coat, was frequently met with.

It may be safely stated that in England a rabbit is profitably kept exactly in proportion to the poverty of the land on which he lives. He will live and thrive in thousands on barren sandhills, where a goat or donkey would starve, and return a handsome annual sum; while one rabbit is destruction in any large garden, and on highly cultivated arable farms even a small number destroy many times their own value of produce. This has long been a perfectly well

known fact to every practical agriculturist, and he knows he might as well expect profit from his sheep if they were allowed to wander at their own sweet will over his whole farm, eating a little bit of the best of everything, as from rabbits allowed to live in this way.

The Hare and Rabbit Bill is meant to give the farmers power to destroy the rabbits, and if it does not answer this purpose, another will be passed.

Rabbits will disappear from our well cultivated farms and also from our dinner tables in thousands.

Probably more poor dry land will be laid out as warrens. Sandy hills near the sea are the situations best adapted to this purpose, as one side is already fenced. Fencing is absolutely necessary and very expensive if done effectually, but not a corn-field will be safe within a mile of the warren if they can get to it. We knew a few acres of wheat once sown which was the only bit in the neighbourhood, and though rabbits were not at all numerous, they found their way to it from all directions. Their little beaten highways, coming straight across large fields to get to it, could be plainly seen from a distance like railroads converging towards their terminus.

To be secure, wire has to be sunk at least eighteen inches and more if the ground is hilly, and

should project in some distance and be nearly five feet high. That there are three ways of getting the other side of a fence—through, under, and over—a rabbit is now well aware, and he is a good hand at all three plans. It is curious to remember that not many years ago they were as completely stopped by open wire netting, three feet or even two feet high, as the French gentleman out hunting was by the first fence he came to, as represented by ‘Leach,’ pulling up short and exclaiming, ‘*Tiens, voilà un obstacle !*’ and that many miles of this netting were put down which the present generation of rabbits have learnt to jump over as if it were a low wall.

And we have known a quantity of strong high wire fencing put to prevent the wild deer in Scotland from getting on to cultivated land which used to answer its purpose perfectly, but now hinds and calves (the stags are prevented by their horns) have learnt to creep through on their sides like dogs, and it is useless.

That wild animals in some extraordinary way gradually inherit an instinct to avoid a new danger, or overcome a new difficulty, is shown by the fact, that when the wires for the electric telegraph were first put up such numbers of birds killed themselves by flying against them that gentlemen wrote to the papers, saying their stock of partridges



would be reduced, and that now hardly any are killed.

Probably the rook and crow of 300 years ago would have cared no more for a man with a gun on his shoulder than for a cart horse, and now we cannot get into the same field with them.

The management of warrens is well understood. We have been told that every five or six years the stock should be greatly reduced and fresh blood largely imported, as the constant in-and-in breeding that goes on causes them to deteriorate in size, and also to become less robust in constitution.

In severe weather the rabbits require extra food, generally most cheaply supplied in the form of hay and turnips. Care must be taken that the ground is not overstocked, and when we have also protected them from the creatures which prey upon them we have done all we can for them.

## CHAPTER III.

## RABBITS' ENEMIES IN A STATE OF NATURE.

THE fox, the cat, the stoat, and weasel are rabbits' deadly enemies.

These last destroy the young probably at the rate of a dozen a day. It is curious to notice how often, if we find a rabbits' nest, and take out and count the little bright-eyed downy creatures, on coming in a day or two to see how they are getting on we find them all lying dead with a small hole in the back of their heads, perhaps eight of them. And each of these might have lived a happy life, and have given quite a party of children a nice meal some day, but for these blood-thirsty little devils. We are inclined to write the epitaph over them which the gentleman put over his poor baby who only lived twenty-four hours :—

If so soon I was to be done for,  
What on earth was I begun for ?

All rabbits seem paralysed when pursued by stoats, and surrender; hopping about and crying

feebly, though they will dash off and escape from any dog, often even from a greyhound, for a short distance. We have driven the stoats from them and picked them up, and in a minute they have run away as fresh as possible, evidently not exhausted. They seem to act as the American colonel said the racoons did. They knew he was such a dead shot, that when he pointed a rifle at them in the tops of the trees they called out, 'Don't shoot, colonel ; we will come down.'

The cats are their next worst enemies. These coolly take up their residence in their burrows and kill a rabbit a day for their dinner ; as often as not a doe in young, or giving suck. Yet the Rev. Mr. Morris tells us we ought on no account to destroy these creatures, and wants the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to prosecute us if we do.

We wish he would rent a rabbit warren for five years, and allow cats and stoats to breed in it, and tell us the result. We fear he would be out of pocket. Quite a number of clever men consider it wrong to destroy vermin, and call it interfering with the balance of Nature.

But if a man will not destroy the creatures which destroy the animals he wants to eat himself, he must first let these creatures dine, and then take

the crumbs that fall from their table as his share. These naturalists expatiate on the suffering of a wild beast in a trap, but care nothing for the sufferings of his daily victims, as they struggle in his grasp, while he slowly sucks their blood. To be consistent, they would allow the wolf in the sheepfold as well as the stoat in the rabbit warren.

The last wolf killed in the British Isles was, we believe, killed in the sixteenth century in the north of Scotland.

Two brothers found her den with cubs in it. One went in to kill the cubs while the other kept guard over the narrow entrance. The cries of the young brought the dam, and she dashed by the man on guard, who caught her by the tail as she entered the hole. 'What makes it so dark, Sandy?' said the one inside. 'You will find out if the tail breaks,' said the other, making desperate efforts to draw his dagger.

We do not like to think of the day when the last fox will be killed in England. It is a consolation to know we shall not be in at that death at any rate, and we will prophecy that when there is not a live wild fox in England there will not be a king or queen on her throne. She will be governed by a president, possibly a grandson of Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Parnell. Foxes kill a good

many rabbits, but do not inflict the injury upon them that cats and stoats do.

Constant wet weather is a cause of destruction to thousands of rabbits, but more particularly on clay soils. They so enjoy being dry, and their little worsted stockings were never meant to get wet. Full-grown rabbits can stand the rain, but it is sad to see the little ones—which must come out of their holes and eat, or starve, as their mother's milk is no longer sufficient for them—come out and sit in heavy rain eating the grass, and then creeping back, chilled and miserable, to sleep in their wet clothes—we mean wet fur—all night. Any mother could guess the consequence. We tried keeping rabbits in an open wire enclosure, but the very young ones all died in wet weather.

Although the rain does not hurt full-grown rabbits, constantly filling their stomachs with wet food does. It brings on liver rot, as with sheep, and they die by thousands. The number of wet seasons we have had lately have so reduced the number of rabbits in this part of the country that on rough moors, where a couple of guns could in an afternoon easily shoot fifty or sixty rabbits a few years ago, last season scarcely more than five or six were seen.

We cannot protect our wild rabbits from the

weather any more than we can our wild pheasants.

Most people know the various ways in which wild rabbits are captured. Unless very numerous, or the weather is very fine, they are not always to be found when wanted.

Were an elderly relative, whom we were anxious to propitiate, to express a sudden desire for 'rabbit,' we should much prefer to be able to go to our rabbit fold for one, as Jacob did to his fold for a kid, instead of having to go out and catch one, as Esau had to go and catch his venison. The old gentleman would very likely have enjoyed his curry and left us his blessing in the shape of a place in his will by the time our unlucky brother had missed his third shot.

Many a man will remember with pleasure the thrill of excitement with which he used to hear the sudden yelp of a favourite terrier who had at last started a rabbit, and his anxious hope that he would at least this time succeed in rolling him over as he crossed a certain opening, as the object of his sincere admiration, 'the keeper,' generally did. And that these hopes were so often disappointed, that when occasionally bunny did go head over heels at the discharge of the gun, it was an open question which of the

three parties interested, Master Frank, Tyke the terrier, or the rabbit was most astonished. But the quickness of hand and eye acquired in learning to shoot this nimble little animal has often stood men in good stead when their chance of dinner has depended on their shooting a black-tailed deer in the back woods of America, and in many a sharp skirmish, the particulars of which were never published.

It was an evil day for the rabbit when the ferret was first domesticated. It is difficult to imagine what men could do to get rabbits out of their burrows without its aid. To dig them out in numbers would be hopeless, and smoking difficult and unsatisfactory. If they feed at some distance from their burrows or cover, a light net is sometimes stretched quietly and quickly between them and their retreat. This is a favourite plan with poachers. A mute dog is then sent round their feeding ground, and as they rush back to cover, they are entangled and caught. But all this must be accomplished very quietly. If a single rabbit takes the alarm and is off for home, the rest all vanish with him. They 'stand not on the order of their going, but go at once.'

In Norfolk numbers of gins used to be set in their runs before sunset, choosing a time when the

nights were not very dark. The trappers used to visit the traps with a lantern at 8 P.M., carry off the captured, and reset the traps, visiting them again after daylight. This is a cruel plan, and is, we believe, now illegal. In some warrens there are open box traps in all the fences through which the rabbits pass to their feeding ground. They learn to run through them as a matter of course. When they are wanted, the springs are set and the traps are all full in the morning. This is the best of plans where practicable. The rabbits are caught unhurt, and the does can be spared if desired.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE RABBIT IN CONFINEMENT.

THE fecundity of the rabbit is remarkable. We knew two does that in one year had ninety-five young ones, and the young does born early in the year bred themselves before winter ; and one of our own does once reared eleven fine healthy young ones at one litter. But we can find no record of their having been reared in any great number on any one spot except for a short time. Our search for a rabbit farm has been as unsuccessful as Mr. Tegetmeirs's search for a poultry farm, and for the same reason. All attempts hitherto made to keep these creatures together in great numbers have been contrary to nature, and have failed accordingly.

Houses have been built at an enormous cost with tiers of hutches, row after row, one above the other. Actually on one farm a thousand of these hutches were put up in this way like enormous chests of drawers. But the company failed, for

epidemics broke out and carried off the young in thousands.

We should as soon ourselves have thought of trying to rear young pheasants by thousands in such a place. The rabbit is by nature a particularly clean animal. There is no smell more unpleasant than that of wild flowers near a rabbit's nest. He lives in the open air, and only retires to his hole for security during the day from his enemies or for warmth.

In common with all animals which have a fixed abode, like the fox, he has the instinct implanted in him of never making his home unpleasant ; an instinct entirely wanting in animals like the horse, cow, and sheep, which, as they never lie down twice in the same place in a state of nature, have not this instinct, which would be useless to them.

All sorts of ingenious plans have been adopted for keeping the floors of hutches clean. They have been dipped in Portland cement that they might be washed. Zinc trays are put under the backs of the hutches, which slope, and sawdust is spread, &c. Rabbits in small numbers can be kept healthy in this way, and if given proper food their health will be in proportion to the attention paid to cleanliness. How necessary this attention is

we should better understand if our olfactory nerves were situated in our toes instead of where they are when we walk about in what is called a well-cleaned rabbit court. But this constant carrying away of offensive matter is very disagreeable work, and spoils the pleasure of rabbit keeping for children. We prefer ourselves to remove the animal from the offensive matter, as Nature would prompt him to remove himself if we did not prevent him. Absence of body is said to be better than presence of mind in a railway accident, and the sooner our young rabbits are bodily removed from all injurious smells the better.

We cannot violate any of Nature's rules with impunity, and pure air is as necessary, and even more so, than wholesome food to all young creatures.

A Kaffir in a hut like a bird's nest, or a Highland shepherd in a cottage with a leaking roof and a mud floor, will rear all their children on what a London nurse would consider highly improper food, while an artisan earning four times the shepherd's wages may lose a third of his in a handsome brick house in one of our large towns. The rate of mortality among infants under three years of age in our cities is out of all proportion to that of adults; and certainly the way men have to

live in crowded towns, in houses many storeys high, is very much the way in which our rabbits live in hutches, tier above tier, the impure air necessarily rising from the lower storeys to be inhaled by the dwellers above them.

Many people have no idea of the interest that is now taken in rabbits, and that pages in several publications are devoted every week to this subject. The various breeds are all described in books devoted to their management.

We ourselves prefer the great, so-called Belgian hare rabbit. He is active and graceful, and looks a thorough wild animal, like a deer; while the lop-eared rabbits, and rabbits of various colours, look more cat-like and domesticated. The white Angora is a beautiful breed. If kept in sufficient numbers, their fur must be valuable.

But they are all pretty objects, and since we have kept our rabbits in the open air, on the green grass, a visit to them has become a pleasure. The does' nests are not allowed to be disturbed, so when the young are about a fortnight old a great deal of watching takes place to see how many will creep out; at first one or two at a time, but in a day or so all come out together.

In the last few days three of our does have brought out respectively nine, eight, and seven;

and these are all now to be seen from the windows playing in the sunshine. It is amusing to notice at first how much wilder the half-bred wild rabbits are than the tame-bred ones. They disappear into their hole like magic on the slightest alarm ; but, seeing how coolly their dear mamma takes matters, they soon become tame themselves. It is also remarkable that very wild animals, like deer, when they are tamed, become dangerously tame and familiar. We knew a young fallow buck knock his owner, an old gentleman, down and keep him down for a long time till rescued by his gardener, badly hurt.

We once saw some greyhounds pull down a wild deer after a good run in the waters of the Buffalo River in South Africa. She was rescued from them unhurt, and carried home. She seemed to lay in a trance for two days and nights, then she roused up, took food from any one who offered it, and within the week was playing with and butting the very dogs who caught her. These, accustomed to all sorts of home pets, acknowledged her as one, and they lived on friendly terms.

Here our dogs and even cats know our tame rabbits must not be injured, in fact the cats play with them. Yet these same cats will, to our disgust, kill the young wild rabbits, and we should shoot

them only they are also capital rat killers. A day or two ago a little grey rabbit escaped from its hutch in the rabbit house and was caught by the cat, who was watching for rats, and she actually carried it into the kitchen, some fifty yards, and put it down alive at one of the servants' feet, just as she does her kittens.

The wild rabbit soon becomes tame if it lives, but numbers die soon after they are captured. Last July a poor little thing, about three weeks old, was found after heavy rain apparently dead. The life-reviving process of putting it in an oven for a short time was adopted. It recovered, and was reared, and is now alive. It always knows its mistress, and used to be allowed out on the table for a little while in winter evenings. It learned to beg for sugar like a dog, and would dance across the table on its hind legs. It always took refuge on its mistress's shoulder at any sudden noise, and tried to hide in her hair. The poet Cowper has recorded how tame his hares became.

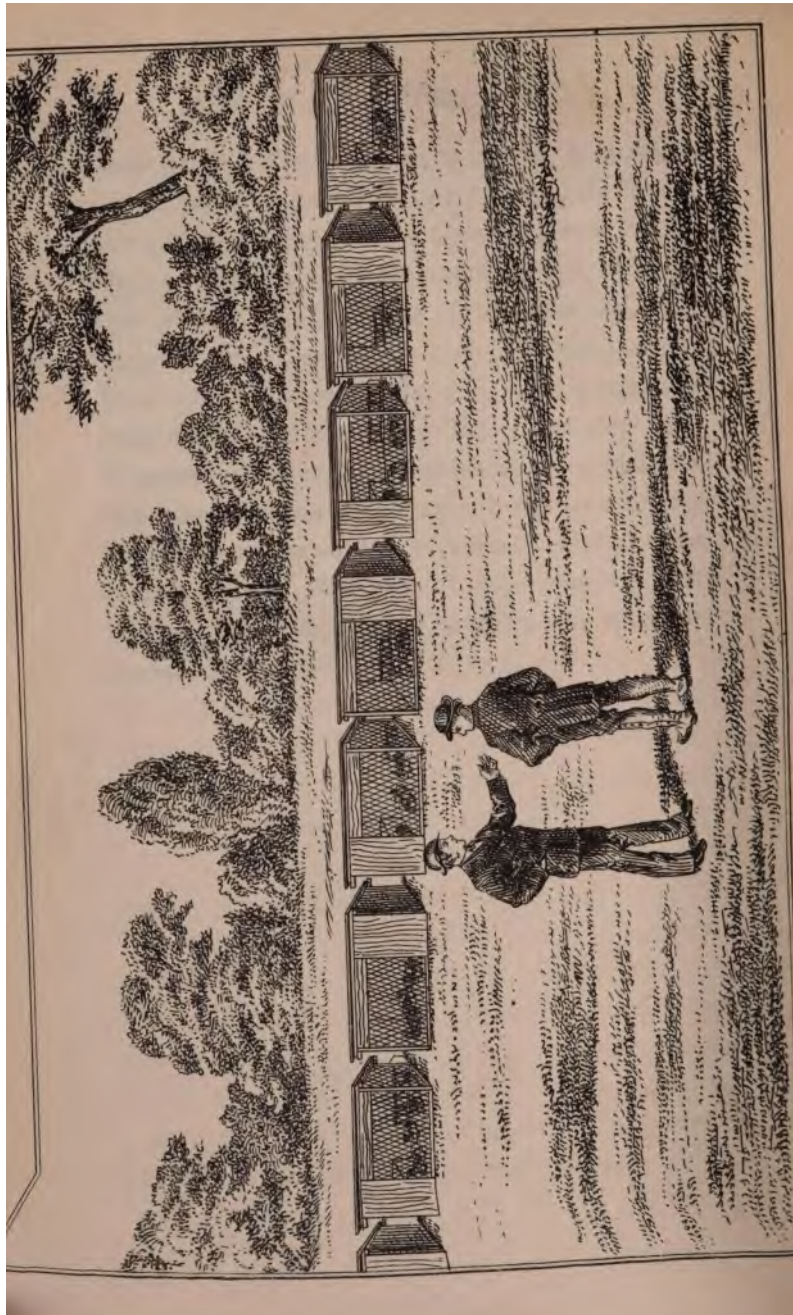
But though rabbits are tame, they soon object to be handled if they have room to escape. We must either be able to put our hand upon them, or we shall require the help of nets or some such contrivance.

People often attempt putting rabbits in a wire

enclosure, with the wire sunk to prevent burrowing under ; and they seem so happy to have their liberty that as long as fine weather lasts all goes well, but when rain sets in, '*a change comes o'er the spirit of their dreams.*' The young die and the old look draggled and miserable. Then the bucks sometimes kill the young. The does have young too often to do justice to either litter, and also fight amongst themselves. The old rabbits eat dainties only meant for the little ones, and run up a bill for meal, &c., and general grief ensues. It cannot be made a success. The ground also, even if a considerable space is devoted to them, very soon becomes tainted.







## CHAPTER V.

## RABBITS AS THEY LIVE AT BLACKERTON.

THE struggle for existence which goes on where animals live in a state of nature reminds us of the Eastern fairy tales of princesses who were from their birth watched over by good and evil genii. On the one side we see creatures capable of producing an almost unlimited number of their kind, all born healthy and likely to live, and become useful as food after passing happy lives. On the other side we see them so surrounded by enemies that they rear comparatively few of their young without judicious assistance from man.

As an instance probably not 10 per cent. of the salmon fry hatched in our rivers ever escape to the sea and return as full-grown salmon, while in the Stormontfield fish-rearing establishment near Perth they rear something like 80 per cent. of the ova hatched, and send annually into the Tay, to find their way into the sea, some 300,000 or 400,000 young salmon. Again, of the young birds our wild phea-

sants hatch in very wet seasons not 10 per cent. live, while keepers who understand their business will in the same season rear 80 per cent. of what they hatch.

If man wishes certain creatures to increase he must act the part of the good genii. He must discover who are their enemies and protect them from them.

We have seen that rabbits die in a state of nature from three causes—the attacks of beasts of prey, from exposure to constant rain, and from constantly living upon wet food.

We easily construct hutches that guard against the first. The fox and the cat may prowl round them like the banished Perii round the gates of Paradise. The stoat and the rat may rub their noses against the wire. There is no admittance.

We guard against the second by having a thin sheet of galvanised iron carefully held over our rabbits wherever they go. Rabbits so protected are no more likely to suffer from the rain than an Eastern prince is to suffer from the sun while followed by obsequious slaves holding an umbrella over him. And giving them daily a certain portion of dry wholesome food counteracts the effect of the wet food they eat, and keeps them in perfect health.

But when rabbits are kept together in numbers in confinement they have a still worse enemy to contend with in the shape of epidemics caused by impure air. We therefore construct our hutches so that they can stand out of doors in all weathers, taking care that the does have a snug nest to rear their young in, and all rabbits a dry shelf to sit on, as the ground is sometimes too damp to be pleasant. We are on clay, and 1,000 feet above the sea.

We construct the bottom of our hutch of galvanised wire netting, which lies flat upon the ground, through which the rabbits graze with perfect ease, and on which the rabbits sit when lifted two or three times a day, thus leaving all impurities behind them, and going on to fresh pasture, exactly as sheep do when their fold is shifted, and, like them, leaving the ground heavily manured and much enriched by their presence. When the object is to separate two bodies, it is not always clear which should move.

We have heard of a difference of opinion between a gentleman and his mother-in-law, as to which should leave the house ; and it is stated in a life of Sir Isaac Newton that he was one day sitting over his study fire, wrapt in an abstruse calculation, when the servant came and put on some coals which, burning freely, soon made the learned

gentleman's legs most unpleasantly hot. He rang the bell furiously for the servant, and implored him to take the coals off as his trousers were singeing. He was much surprised at being told that if he drew his chair back it would answer the purpose more quickly. We as confidently recommend moving the rabbits from the manure as a better plan than moving the manure from the rabbits.

Whether it is the cultivation of a plant or the rearing of a young animal that is the object to be attained, it is only by imitating nature in her most favourable moods that man can succeed. We consider our rabbits live under more favourable conditions than their wild neighbours on the same farm, and if they die before their time, it must be out of what a Yankee would call 'sheer cussedness.'

But we do not find they die, and the feeding of a few does and their young ones is an interesting amusement for children and also a useful one, and children like to know they are useful.

Last year three little girls, the eldest thirteen, had in their play-hours entire charge of five does and their young, having at one time sixty-seven rabbits, all of which lived and thrived. As the hutches are simply lifted forward whenever the rabbits are fed, no cleaning is required. Of course



the children must go out in all weathers from March to October. But we have a theory, and act on it, that it is large nursery fires and hot bedrooms, not rain and wind and wet feet, that give children colds and coughs, and out they go to the horror of nurses of orthodox principles.

Certainly, during the equinoctial gales a considerable amount of wrapping up takes place which generally proves a failure as far as keeping the wearers dry is concerned. Probably waterproof hats are borrowed from some elder members of the family, but these generally blow off in a few minutes and are not recovered till next day. However, the expedition returns with rosy cheeks, and no worse consequence ensues than that a considerable number of small damp garments of 'sorts' may be hanging over the kitchen fire in the evening. Nevertheless, should any of our readers approve of our plan of open-air rearing of rabbits, they are not obliged also to approve of the same plan being applied to youthful specimens of the genus *homo*.

Possibly this disregard for rain and wind may be thought to too nearly resemble the habits of the large antediluvian arboreal apes, from which some modern philosophers believe we are descended. If so, some attendant or older member of the family had better go out in wet weather.

Then a journal has to be kept in the best of writing, and with as few mistakes in spelling as can be conveniently managed, in which are recorded such important facts as how Lady Mary reared eleven young ones at a litter, and how a young half-bred wild rabbit escaped from its keepers in early summer and took refuge in a corn-field, where, after harvest, he allowed himself to be recaptured on a Friday, so grown he was hardly recognised, and was called 'Man Friday,' until his producing a litter proved the name to be inapplicable.

But even the rabbits reared by children are not to be despised as a 'food supply,' and in most households two or three rabbits a week are an acceptable change to the bill of fare.

How far they can be reared profitably in large numbers those interested will soon find out, and if they begin with a few does, and work up, they cannot lose much money. It is no longer a question of crowding animals, meant to live in woods and fields and breezy sandhills, into buildings, and if one hundred can live in one field, as we have them living, there is no reason why any number of hundreds should not live in any number of similar fields.

We hear from the mining districts that wild

rabbits fetch as much as 3s. 6d. a couple. We find most of our rabbits weigh 4 lbs. at twelve weeks old. The first four or five weeks they live on their mother's milk almost entirely. After weaning we give hay and a certain quantity of Indian corn, bran, &c., besides green food. We believe rabbits could be fattened entirely on clover and clover hay, but it is worth while to give Indian corn as well, because the manure is so much more valuable. Twelve hutches, each holding twelve rabbits, will, if moved twice a day, go over four acres of ground in a season, and the quantity of manure deposited by twelve rabbits in a day should be gathered in a zinc tray, and be seen to be believed. The poorest land must in a short time become full of valuable plant food if they are fed upon it.

The hutches are a pretty object on a lawn or in pleasure grounds, and do not spoil the turf if often moved; in fact, it grows intensely green and thick behind them, and anyone who already has nice hutches of the usual pattern will find one or two in which they can put the young rabbits when weaned a great help in rearing them.

The beautiful white Angora rabbits show very well on the grass, and their long silky fur keeps very clean.

As space is not an object, we are able to give



the rabbits plenty of room, giving the does hutches  $5 \times 2$  feet and the young ones hutches  $6 \times 3$  feet. If made larger they become heavy to lift. 3 feet 6 inches  $\times$  1 foot 6 inches is thought a large hutch on the old plan.

The back, one end, and two feet of the front are of close boards. One end and the rest of the front and the whole of the floor of wire net. That rabbits could be carried on this without rushing about and breaking their legs we did not believe until repeated experiments showed us that a sense of insecurity makes them squat ; and though hundreds must have been moved miles, we have not had an accident. They soon learn to look forward to the move, and are all grazing on the young grass almost before they are fairly on level ground. A shelf projects from the closed end of the hutch which allows of sufficient room for every rabbit in the hutch ; and if the ground is damp, they generally sit and sleep on this when not feeding or playing about. A board with a hole in it connects this shelf with the floor, and a false bottom of wood is laid under the shelf on the wire when the doe is expected to have young. This makes her as snug a nest as she could wish for, and of course the young from the day they are born move with her whenever she is moved. We take away this false

bottom as soon as the young rabbits can jump on the shelf.

The hutches are made in pairs, the opposite ends of each pair being close boarded, so that at night, or in rain and wind, the outside pair of each four are wheeled inwards and form square. The rabbits are then perfectly protected whichever way the wind blows, while they can be fed through the troughs at the back, and also enjoy plenty of light and air. We have had the hutches standing like this for forty-eight hours at a time and the rabbits in perfect comfort. Of course the plan applies to any number of fours—twenty or four hundred—and they can be so placed almost as fast as two people can walk down the line.

The hutches can either be constructed handsomely for the garden or more roughly and cheaply for the farm, and every effort is being made to supply them cheaply and to contract for large numbers.

No doubt, that a large profit can be made out of rabbits will not be believed until it has been accomplished. But we know that fifty young ones in a season is a small average from two does. Therefore it is not only possible, but highly probable, that 200 does managed on this natural plan would rear at least 5,000 young ones. These, at twelve weeks

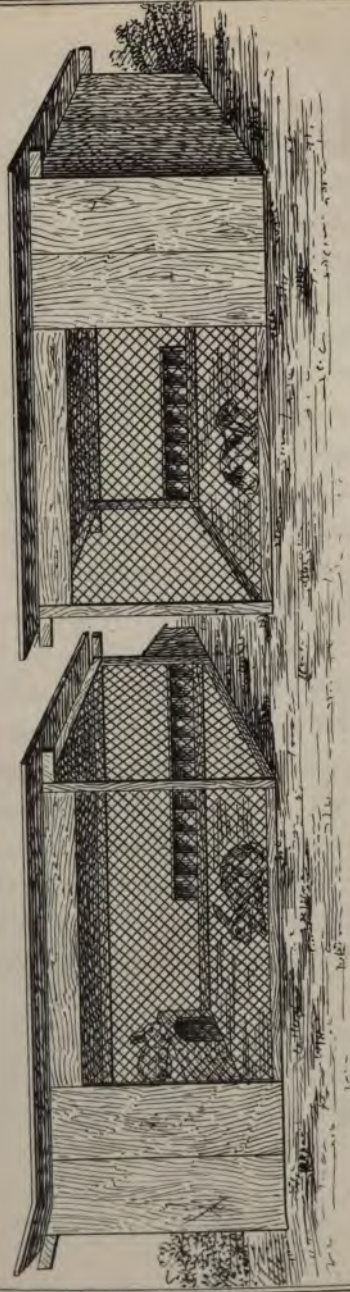
old, should weigh 4 lbs. each, and with their skins be worth, at 6*d.* per lb., 500*l.*

Two lads can move 200 hutches and feed their inhabitants in an hour and a half. A wheelbarrow or small cart can accompany them with the food, and the value of the manure will well pay the labour. This seems to leave a large margin for profit. In winter, having plenty of shed room from November to February, the rabbits kept for breeding stand under cover, well bedded down with straw and lifted from side to side occasionally for cleaning. They feed principally on hay and roots, and what they eat is scarcely noticed, where there is any sort of quantity of these grown, but they would live as well out of doors if necessary.

If the season is mild, the young will be born in the end of February, and the hutches can be carried out of doors in March, in which month the young wild rabbits appear. Our own rabbits are so much better off than these when rain and wind sets in, that it is easy to imagine a wild doe with her drowning young ones asking one of our pets if she thought she could induce master to catch them all.

Some readers may think rabbits quite unworthy all this trouble, but we would again remind them that if pleuro-pneumonia or rinder-pest carry off





## THE BLACKERTON RABBIT HUTCH.

*Protected by Royal Letters Patent.*

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*To be procured from the Manager, Blackerton Farm,  
Dulverton, Devonshire.*

our cattle and liver fluke reduces our flocks, or if men capable of buying beef and mutton increase faster than the animals they feed upon, the price of these will soon be even higher than they are. Numbers will then have to become vegetarians or live principally on pork.

We consider rabbits such very superior food for children that any rational plan for rearing them in great numbers is worthy of serious consideration.

